

Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 8/88

IRON AGE POTTERY FROM FRANCE AND
'GLASTONBURY WARE' FROM THE 1985/6
EXCAVATIONS AT MAIDEN CASTLE,
DORSET.

D F Williams PhD FSA

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Summary

Identification of sherds of pottery from Armorica and
Glastonbury ware sherds from Peacock's Group 1 (Gabbro),
Group 4 (Shell) and Group 5 (Sanidine).
(Cf. Report No. 17/87).

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IRON AGE POTTERY FROM FRANCE AND 'GLASTONBURY WARE' FROM THE
1935/6 EXCAVATIONS AT MAIDEN CASTLE (SECOND REPORT)

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Introduction

Eleven sherds of Iron Age pottery from the recent excavations at Maiden Castle, Dorset, were submitted for a detailed examination in thin section under the petrological microscope. This group of sherds were suspected of being imports to the site, 'Glastonbury ware' and pottery from the French side of the Channel. The object of the analysis, therefore, was to carefully examine the fabrics involved with a view to ascribing origins to the individual sherds.

Petrology

Armorican 'rilled micaceous ware'

401-5004 AOR 3157

401-5004 AOR 3155

401-5002 AOR 3039

All three sherds contain conspicuous flakes of mica in the hand-specimen. In thin section these are seen to be mostly muscovite in composition. Also present are frequent grains of quartz and some altered feldspar. The texture of the

sherds is identical to rilled micaceous pottery from Hengistbury Head previously examined by the writer (Cunliffe, 1987, Fabric B1-3). An Armorican source again seems highly probable, with the finds in Brittany clustering along the north coast from the Cote du Nord into north Finistere.

'Glastonbury ware' - Gabbro

401-5497 AOR 3097

401-5002 AOR 3040

The most prominent inclusions are made up of angular grains of partly decomposed felspar, some of which have altered to sericite, fresher plagioclase and colourless or brown grains of amphibole, many of which appear as fibrous aggregates. Also present is a little pyroxene, serpentine and some grains of quartz. This assemblage of minerals closely resembles Peacock's (1969) description of the natural weathering clays overlying the gabbro deposits on the Lizard Head, Cornwall, and these sherds from Maiden Castle undoubtedly belong to his Group 1 (Gabbro) from this source.

'Glastonbury ware' - Sanidine

401-5289 AOR 3142

401-5289 AOR 3143

401 5916 AOR 3176

In thin section frequent rounded fragments of sandstone, shale, siltstone and mudstone can be seen, with some igneous material, flecks of mica and quartzite. However, the most prominent inclusions are rounded grains of orthoclase felspar,

in particular sanidine. The fabric of these sherds from Maiden Castle matches very closely Peacock's (1969) Group 5 (sanidine) which it was suggested derived from the Permian of south-western England. In particular the area north of Watcombe to Exeter and along the Crediton Valley as far as Colebrook was singled out as being the likely source of the raw materials used in the potting.

'Glastonbury ware' - Shell

401-5001 AOR 3175

401-5004 AOR 3158

In thin section frequent pieces of shell and limestone are scattered throughout the fabric. The limestone is a shelly limestone or biosparite and it is likely that the fragments of shell derived from it. Both sherds belong to Peacock's (1969) Group 4 (shell). A Jurassic origin was postulated, but the exact source, or sources, remain unknown.

Metamorphic

401-5002 AOR 3041

This sherd has a very distinctive fabric, orangy-buff in colour and with many inclusions protruding through the surfaces of the sherd. Under the microscope the dominant inclusions can be seen to be fragments of cordierite-schist, calc-silicate rocks and quartzite, together with discrete grains of quartz, muscovite, biotite and amphibole (tremolite). This range of inclusions suggests derivation from meta-basic and meta-sedimentary rocks, and points to an area of regional metamorphism. The south-west of the country, i.e. Devon and Cornwall, seem unlikely, rather more probable would appear to be the metamorphic zones of

Britanny and Normandy, the Armorican Massif in particular.

References

- Cunliffe, B. (1987) Hengistbury Head, Dorset, Vol. 1 Oxford University
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- Peacock, D.P.S. (1969) 'A contribution to the study of Glastonbury ware from
south-western Britain', Antiq. J., 49(1969), 41-61.